

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF DAVID B. LIROFF

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Mr. Chairman and Commissioners, I am David Liroff, Vice President and Chief Technology Officer for WGBH Educational Foundation. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this panel on behalf of the Association of America's Public Television Stations and public television stations throughout the country.

The potential impact of the transition to ATV on consumers was eloquently posed by you, Mr. Chairman, when you asked in a recent speech:

Will we be able to use this new TV . . . not only to entertain our families, but also to educate our children, participate in political debate, gain knowledge, enrich our lives?

Public television's answer is yes. If public television stations receive the funding and regulatory support needed to make the transition to ATV, we will use ATV technology—as we have used NTSC technology in the past—to advance our mission of educating and enlightening the American public.

Public television stations are distinguished from their commercial counterparts—both broadcast and cable—in one overarching way: we are mission driven, not profit driven. We address our viewers as citizens, not as consumers. It is because of this fundamental difference that we are the clear leaders in educational children's programming, in instructional classroom programming, and in award-winning high-quality programming for general audiences.

The possibilities are far too numerous to detail in my short remarks here, but let me touch on a few. Public television's most widely recognized,

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nationally distributed programs would be spectacular if broadcast in HDTV. For example, if WGBH's science and technology series *NOVA* were broadcast in high definition, audiences could explore in amazing, microscopic detail the inner workings of the human body or view with breathtaking, telescopic clarity the vast expanses of the universe. The wide screen format, enhanced clarity, CD quality surround sound, and broader range of artistic options will likewise enable audiences of our performing arts programs—including ballet, drama, symphony and opera—to feel like they are attending a live performance.

For over a quarter of a century, public television stations have used newly-developed technologies to help learners of all ages achieve their educational and career goals. ATV technology will allow public television stations to expand access to critical learning opportunities for all Americans at home, in schools and colleges, and in the workplace. Stations previously constrained by limited channel capacity will now have the ability to deliver, simultaneously, multiple channels of educational programming aimed at specific needs of different types of learners.

For example, a typical schedule on a single ATV channel could include primetime HDTV programming and, during the day, four distinct program services. Examples of any one of these program services may be found today on public TV stations all over the country, but each station must choose which of several audiences it will serve at any time of the day. With ATV, stations will be able to unlock the full potential of their public service mission by offering public service programming for several constituencies simultaneously.

Illustratively, these services could include children's programming comparable to today's Ready to Learn Service; instructional programming for use in classrooms; adult education, G.E.D. and college credit telecourses; and state government/public affairs channels, comparable to those available today in many areas of the country, providing coverage of state legislatures and related local and state government activities.

Public television stations can use additional digital transmission capacity to distribute, along with the instructional programming, program-related course materials, textbooks, student and teacher guides, computer software and content areas of the World Wide Web to students and faculty.

This is just one scenario. The combinations of possible services are limited only by the creativity of local public television stations, working in partnerships with state agencies, schools, hospitals, libraries and other community organizations, to provide programs and services that their viewers value. For example, at WGBH we envision a channel specifically designed to serve viewers with special needs—such as with open captions for the hearing impaired, or descriptive video for the blind, or foreign-language translations.

Public television can utilize the enormous flexibility of ATV and HDTV technology to enhance our ability to educate and enlighten the public only with legislative and regulatory support. The challenges of converting public television to digital ATV transmission, which are formidable to begin with, are even more daunting given the current funding crisis facing public television. As the video marketplace makes the transition to digital services, many public stations will be unable to finance this transition, and their communities will be left behind. Such stations are likely to experience a

downward spiral resulting in the loss of viewers, contributions, underwriting revenue and ultimately the loss of service to the public and the failure to realize the promise of ATV technology.

As you may know, we have presented Congress with a legislative proposal, which we believe is an important step toward meeting the dual challenge of continuing current operations and financing the transition to ATV. Our proposal would require the cooperation of the Commission. We have asked the Commission, in comments submitted on behalf of the stations by APTS and PBS, to afford public broadcasters flexible regulatory treatment during the transition to ATV. I would be happy to address any aspects of our vision, or the assistance we need to realize that vision, in response to questions.

In closing, I would note that, with the help of the Commission, as well as Congress, advanced television can be an opportunity rather than a burden. Public television can utilize advanced television spectrum to begin to establish a long term funding source and to further its mission to educate, inform and enrich the lives of all Americans.